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AUTHOR	Miller, Michael T.; McCormack, Thomas F.; Pope, Myron L.
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ABSTRACT

This report presents a study that examined the desired roles and characteristics of faculty co-governance bodies. The study was conducted as part of the creation of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance Project at the University of Alabama which was developed as a collaborative project among individual scholars from across the United States in 1993, and currently has involved nearly 30 higher education institutions in data collection. Data for the current study were collected between 1994 and 1996 from eight institutions. A total of 713 faculty participated in the survey where faculty expressed their opinions about the roles of faculty in the governance process, general beliefs of faculty toward shared governance, and the characteristics of an ideal governance process. The results of the study show that faculty supported the concepts of improved communications and trust between faculty and administration. (Contains 14 references.) (SWM)

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Sharing Authority in Higher Education: Faculty Involvement in Governance

ED 447 764

Dr. Michael T. Miller
Associate Dean
College of Education
San Jose State University
One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192-0071
(408) 924-3607
FAX: (408) 924-3713
email: mmiller5@email.sjsu.edu

Dr. Thomas F. McCormack
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Marion Military Institute

Dr. Myron L. Pope
Assistant Professor
Department of Adult and Higher Education
University of Oklahoma

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Abstract

The current study examines the roles and desired characteristics of faculty co-governance bodies. Involving faculty from four different types of higher education institutions, faculty were found to support the concepts of improved communications and trust between faculty and administrators.

Faculty involvement in governance has historically taken many forms, and has caused a great deal of anxiety and stress for both faculty and administrators alike. Despite this discomfort in sharing authority, involvement by a variety of participants in institutional governance has the potential to greatly add to the effectiveness, productivity, and quality of academic programs and business operations (Howell, 1982; McCormack, 1995). Faculty participation in the governance process has been viewed as essential to effective administration, dependent upon several factors, including the administrative leadership styles of those who have the ability to involve faculty, the culture of the institution which may or may not solicit or encourage faculty participation, the beliefs and values of trustees and those serving on governing boards which relate to the sharing of authority by administrators (Birnbaum, 1992), and the legal interpretation set forth by the university concerning the Connick v. Meyer and Knight v. Minnesota legal decisions (Miles, 1987).

Regardless of the institution's independent culture, current public demands for institutional accountability and effectiveness warrant college and university consideration of consensus development activities. These activities are often found in the use of a senate, council, or faculty advisory committee. Gilmour (1991) reported that over 90% of the institutions he surveyed had some formal faculty

governance body. Consistent with the modelling suggested by Birnbaum (Birnbaum, 1991), faculty participation in governance may largely be a result, or alternatively a defining criterion, of institutional mission, culture, and the perceived role of faculty by administrators. Birnbaum identified the collegial institution governance model, inclusive of those institutions whose primary focus is teaching and is typified as the undergraduate liberal arts institution, as an example of the methods and procedures possible for shared authority. Conversely, Baldridge (1982) argued that such an ideal setting where faculty meet in friendly environments to debate academic standards, policy, and administrative operations has never existed in the realm of higher education. He went on to refer to an ideal setting of true shared authority as a "fable" and "kingdom" which has been advocated by many but successfully implemented by few.

The American private sector has embraced the concept of participatory management with much excitement and publicity, emphasizing quality circles and employee empowerment. And although managers have realized greater effectiveness by sharing "power" among employees, others have argued that requiring more of front-line employees is a mechanism for requiring more work without subsequent pay differentials, increases in benefits or titles, or little protection from

results of inaccurate or unproductive decision results (Kameras, 1996).

Although the controversies over involving faculty in decision-making have proven to be somewhat cyclical in nature, demonstrated by Kerr's (1991) observation over faculty empowerment in the early-1970's and a rebirth in the late-1980's and 1990's, the current study assumes that regardless of the need for faculty involvement, the very issue demands greater attention from both professional and scholarly communities. The purpose for conducting the current study on faculty involvement in governance is to better portray the current state of faculty involvement and suggest methods and techniques for developing an environment and policy framework directed at the greater sharing of decision-making in higher education.

Benefits and Barriers to Shared Governance

Higher education's capacity to involve faculty and other constituencies in governance and administration has proven to be both creative and problematic. From the standpoint of administrators, the extra time needed for decision-making as well as the methods for involvement often prove cumbersome for closure and consensus (Bing & Dye, 1992). Alternatively, administrators and faculty alike find comfort, power, and effectiveness in the sharing of

decision-making on issues of major concern to the institution (Birnbaum, 1991).

The institutional benefits of involving faculty in the governance process include greater personal investment by faculty in the work they do and are expected to do, greater organizational commitment, more and a wider selection of options developed due to the increased number of actors involved in creating solutions to difficult problems, more open and creative communication among faculty, among faculty and administrators, and among administrators, stronger dedication to the workplace, and even better teaching, research, and service being performed (Miller, McCormack, & Newman, in press; Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownless-Conyers, 1996).

Barriers to involving faculty, however, exist in many shapes and forms, including trust among faculty groups, faculty and administrators, and among administrators who attempt to involve faculty, increased requests for commitment and work production without corresponding increases in compensation, over-workload requests which leads to burnout among talented faculty willing to get involved, the abilities of faculty and administrators working in areas they may be unfamiliar with, and the commitment to additional time for making decisions and implementing these decisions (Miller, McCormack, & Newman, 1995). A growing concern for many institutions has been

identified as the legal perception placed on faculty involvement. As Miles (1987) indicated, faculty have been greatly restricted in the amount of involvement they can have, and afforded involvement only through the willingness of administrators to allow for the sharing of authority. Miles indicated that the Knight v. Minnesota decision and the Connick v. Meyer decision both dictate that faculty have no legal right to involvement, and in fact, have a much more limited scope of "academic freedom" than many faculty believe to be the case. Such an instance is problematic, as Miles argued, in that faculty do not even have the legal right to alter course curricula, syllabi, or question administrative decisions.

Research Methods

The current study was conducted as part of the creation of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG) Project at the University of Alabama. The NDBFIG was developed as a collaborative project among individual scholars from across the United States in 1993, and currently has involved nearly 30 higher education institutions in data collection.

Data for the current study were collected between 1994 and 1996 from three comprehensive community colleges, two comprehensive universities, and three research-oriented universities. The same survey instrument was administered

independently on each of the participating institutions campuses.

The survey instrument contained three sections, two of which were germane to the current study, including a section on the roles of faculty in the governance process, and a section on characteristics of an ideal governance process. The third section not included in the current study related to the general beliefs of faculty toward shared governance. Each of the two sections of the survey used in the current study contained five statements, and full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty were asked to report their level of agreement with each statement on a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 3=Neutral Agreement, 5=Strongly Agree).

The survey instrument was pilot tested on four doctoral and research university faculties prior to its use in the current study. A Cronbach alpha level of .81 was achieved, and the survey was assumed to be reliable.

Results

A total of 713 faculty responded, all of whom were full-time, tenured or tenure-earning. Responses were obtained from 110 (15%) faculty at three different community colleges, 27 (4%) faculty from a professional, graduate level institution, 64 (9%) faculty from two comprehensive teaching universities, and 512 (72%) from five Carnegie

classification research universities. Due to the variance in the size of each category represented, and the exploratory nature of the study, descriptive statistics were used.

Roles of Faculty

Research university faculty reported the highest agreement (mean 4.09; see Table 1) with their role in the governance process was to insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles, such as curriculum requirements, graduation requirements. The same role was also identified by comprehensive university faculty (mean 4.33). This role was identified as the second highest mean rating of agreement on a role by faculty from the professional graduate school (mean 4.33), and the third most agreed to statement by community college faculty (mean 4.00). This was the only statement which rated in the top three of all response groups.

Community college faculty agreed most with the role of committees working harder to cooperate with administrators (mean 4.22), and professional education faculty agreed most (mean 4.40) with the role of faculty assisting in clarifying roles of administrators in policy formation and implementation.

Ideal Governance Process

Unlike the identification of roles, the four groups of faculty agreed on their identification of the

characteristics of an ideal governance process (see Table 2). Research university faculty (mean 3.68), comprehensive university faculty (mean 3.93), and community college faculty (mean 3.95) all reported the highest agreement level with the characteristic of using the faculty senate as a conduit for soliciting faculty participation. Professional education faculty had a mean score of 4.22 on this item, making it their third highest characteristic.

Faculty from the community college (mean 3.94), professional education institution (mean 4.33), and from the research university (mean 3.64) all reported their second highest agreement level with the characteristic of faculty empowerment to question policy decisions through a well articulated process. This characteristic had the third highest agreement level for comprehensive university faculty (mean 3.61).

Professional education faculty had the highest mean score (mean 4.97) on the characteristic of institutional procedures should involve faculty early in the decision making process. This characteristic was the second highest rated by comprehensive university faculty (mean 3.80), and was third highest for both the community college faculty (mean 3.78) and research university faculty (mean 3.42).

Discussion

The roles and responsibilities of faculty members have

become increasingly complex, a dimension of the teaching profession which adds to the difficulty of assessing faculty performance. Although self performance is rarely considered in the assessment of teaching, the current study provided a framework for evaluating where faculty are in terms of their role in co-governance, and where faculty want to proceed with this responsibility.

For the current roles of faculty in governance, faculty believe that they must encourage, support, and allow faculty to take responsibility for their actions, they must encourage the acceptance of faculty decisions and discussion to be taken seriously, and faculty must work hard to clarify their specific roles, actions, and authority in decision making. Beyond these current roles, faculty generally were found supportive of the use of the faculty senate as a mechanism for involving other faculty and for the coordination of governance committees. In a similar mindset, all faculty seemed supportive of the empowering of faculty to question and fight policy decisions, and for the right to be involved early in the decision making process.

Of note, community college faculty believed they should be working harder, consistent with Gilmour's (1991) finding that most faculty senates are not found in the community college. Conversely, research university faculty did not perceive specific outcomes as part of their role in governance, perhaps suggesting that tenure, promotion, and

merit indicators are predefined and exclusive of participation in governance.

Faculty were also found to be interested and eager to be vested in the decision making process. Overall, they were supportive of sharing authority, but it remains to be seen if faculty will indeed take this responsibility seriously and perform it efficiently. The gap between this academic understanding and practice is great, and much more action-based research is needed. This research should explore not only the clarification of roles, responsibilities, trust and distrust, but the ability of administrators to empower and vest with responsibility the faculty who have the potential to transform higher education institutions into the noble and serving intellectual repositories of their past.

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Table 1

Current Roles of Faculty Involvement in Governance Processes

Characteristic	CC Mean SD N=110	PEF Mean SD N=27	CUF Mean SD N=64	RUF Mean SD N=512
Faculty should assist in clarifying roles of administrators so that they know they are to administer policy and not impose their own.	3.75 1.02	4.40 .636	3.90 1.011	3.47 .897
Faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles (such as curriculum, graduation requirements, etc.)	4.00 .778	4.33 1.143	4.33 .655	4.09 .931
Faculty should be more involved in developing specific outcomes for budgetary expenditures	3.78 .980	4.18 .878	4.13 .826	2.91 1.13
Convince the administration that the faculty "voice" is a valuable component in decision making	4.09 .904	4.11 .933	4.05 1.06	3.78 .873
Faculty committees should work harder to cooperate with administration	4.22 .712	3.29 .912	3.21 .922	3.22 .795

Table 2

Characteristics of an Ideal Governance Process

Characteristic	CC Mean SD N=110	PEF Mean SD N=27	CUF Mean SD N=64	RUF Mean SD N=512
The faculty senate is used as a conduit through which faculty participation is solicited	3.95 .850	4.22 .751	3.93 1.06	3.68 .813
Faculty are empowered to question policy decisions through a well articulated process	3.94 .993	4.33 1.143	3.61 1.34	3.64 .676
Institutional procedures involve faculty governance early in the decision making process	3.78 1.10	4.97 1.141	3.80 1.30	3.42 .747
Faculty members are adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process	2.86 1.05	2.11 .933	2.26 .821	2.90 .899
Neutral "consultants" are utilized to mediate faculty-administration dealings	3.22 1.03	3.18 1.20	3.04 1.21	2.60 1.093